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ABSTRACT

The process of developing a testing/evaluation/instruction management subsystem that will be uniquely suited to the specific situation of a given district requires a decision to use a strategy for instructional change in which data from testing and evaluation would play a major role. Considerations that might go into such a decision involve some of the elements of an analytic framework specified by Bank and Williams (1981). Major questions are: (1) whether a testing/evaluation/instruction management strategy is worth the effort; (2) what opportunities and constraints are posed by the relevant environments and how will these environments shape the strategy; (3) what ideas related to testing and evaluation run consistently through the district; and (4) what effect would these ideas have on strategy choice and implementation. Further considerations are the operational elements necessary to implement a management subsystem, the formal and informal structures that will serve as coordinating mechanisms to make testing and evaluation useful to teachers, and the impact of the subsystem on instruction. (CM)

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CONSIDERATIONS IN DECIDING ON A DISTRICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR LINKING TESTING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES WITH INSTRUCTIONAL CHANGE

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The intent of the Evaluation Design Project conducted at the Center for the Study of Evaluation, with Adrianne Bank and Richard C. Williams as co-directors, was to examine a small sub-set of existing district policies, procedures, and programs that appear to contribute to systematic use of evaluation and testing for educational improvement. It was expected that the project, by addressing itself to the influences on and the concerns of school and district personnel, would be in a position to make suggestions for other districts' guidance.

Through an extensive nomination procedure, six districts were identified whose administrators claimed their district was attempting to use test scores or evaluation data as a guide to revising one or more aspects of their instructional activities. During subsequent interviews with district and school personnel in each of the districts, we found a variety of practices that districts used to link testing and evaluation with instruction. We found that the specific practices differed from district to district, as did the districts' intraorganizational structures and the sequence in which their management subsystem linking testing and evaluation evolved.

In the districts we visited, we saw practices that can be roughly grouped into three configurations. These configurations will be referred to as strategies and are fully described in the paper School District

Management Strategies to Link Testing with Instructional Change (Bank, 1981). We do not mean that these three are the only possible strategies nor that the districts set out to create a system to implement a particular strategy.

1. An instructionally-oriented, objectives-based strategy. This district adopted structured diagnostic/prescriptive teaching supported by a district-wide scope and sequence outline of objectives, a criterion-referenced testing system continuously updated, and materials cross-referenced to the objectives and to the tests.

2. A personnel-oriented staff development strategy. Great school-to-school variability and the likelihood that principal and teaching staffs would remain stable influenced at least one of the districts to adopt a personnel-oriented staff development strategy as a key to data based instructional change. Their assumption was that teachers themselves made the major difference in student learning and that data about deficits in student achievement should determine the content of staff development courses.

3. A building-oriented problem solving strategy. Schools in this district, for reasons of ethnicity, geography, and tradition, represented distinctive organizational entities. The district felt that school staffs and parents should together identify their problems and devise solutions using testing and evaluation data.

Although the term strategy will bring to mind direction and purpose, we found that most districts we visited had not made a plan or a blueprint prior to taking the actions that seemed to result in a strategy. What they did evolved out of events, interests of people, effects of the environment. At some point in time, these activities were conceptualized or reconceptualized so that future activities could be justified or made plausible. At that point, and for some districts, what could be called a strategy emerged.

A wide range of reasons influenced our six districts to do what they did to use data to influence instructional decisions. Clearly the immediacy of state or federal mandates and funds was one factor. Obvious shortcomings in student skills in some cases, internal pressures within particular district offices, or the special interests of individuals in positions of power on the Board or within the district provided the impetus. Districts seemed to be, in this manner, adjusting and accommodating - in the Piagetean sense of the phrase - to the various inputs and demands made upon them.

Although what we described above was the pattern we most often found, we suggest that it <u>is</u> possible for leaders in districts to visualize and shape a management strategy in a way that is more proactive for subsequent activities. It should be possible for leaders to understand many of the constraints and influences active on and within the district and then take reasonable steps to move in an instructional change direction. If we believe public schools should be seeking instructional change thereby improving student learning, and if we believe testing and evaluation can

contribute to this change, we should clarify, as best we can, the process of developing a testing/evaluation/instruction management subsystem that will be uniquely suited to the specific situation of a given district.

In this paper we will deal with some of the considerations that might go into a decision to use a strategy for instructional change in which data from testing and evaluation would play a major role. We will use, as organizers, some of the elements of an analytic framework specified by Bank and Williams (1981). There are certain things these elements can do and other things that they cannot do. They can help us think about the district as an organization embedded in and responsive to its environment. They can bring attention to ideas, operations, and mechanisms already in place. An analysis using these elements can make the decision-making process somewhat less uncertain. Such analysis will raise but not answer our questions. The decision to develop a management strategy and the specifics of that strategy must be unique to a district and not acquired as a shelf-item from other districts. While it is true that many districts share common characteristics, in no two districts is the combination and arrangement of characteristics the same.

Commitment to develop a strategy for managing data based instructional change will lead district personnel into a multitude of decisions and considerations of complex issues. Since effort beyond that required simply to maintain the status quo is needed, a first major question might be: IS SUCH A T/E/I MANAGEMENT STRATEGY WORTH THE EFFORT? The answer to that general question may be forthcoming from answers to more specific questions.

- are administrators, teachers, and parents satisfied with what the districts' schools are doing in relation to student learning?
- do these individuals see a gap between what the schools are doing and what it would be possible to do?
- do these individuals believe that educational leadership requires activism and a constant search for better alternatives?
- do these individuals believe that more effective instruction can come, at least in part, as a result of examining the present performance of students on tests or the present performance of programs as indicated by evaluations?

A second question, concerned with relevant environments, might be: WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE CONSTRAINTS POSED BY THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE DISTRICT ORGANIZATION IS EMBEDDED? HOW WILL THESE ENVIRONMENTS SHAPE THE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY?

Relevant environments include factors external to the district organization but which act upon it. Geographic factors such as the existence of schools isolated or clustered together; community factors such as size, its socio-economic, political, or religions organization; historic factors such as its past tradition or reputation and its expectations for the future. Such factors in the environment can help or hinder data-based instructional change. Answers to the specific questions below might help to answer the more general foregoing question.

- how have testing and evaluation results been historically used in this district?

- do parents and members of the district community usually share the belief that test results reflect the learning of students and that the district has responsibility for increasing that learning through instruction?
- what specific instances are there of this belief? Is it shared by all parents?
- what are the external pressures and incentives to use testing and evaluation results to improve instruction? have there been federal or court mandates? how strong a pressure has the media, through its critical appraisal of the public school system, put on the district?
- what is the attitude of the opinion leaders in the community towards the issue of more efficiency in the schools and how supportive would they be in the event that the district commits itself to a strategy for improvement?
- geographically, what is the organization of the schools within the district? are the same issues being considered at the different schools or are the issues and problems different at each school site?

A third general question might be related to ideas, an element in the framework that refers to ideas specific to testing, evaluation, and instruction and how they interact with one another; also included would be those ideas specific to the management of the subsystem linking testing and evaluation with instruction: WHAT IDEAS RELATED TO TESTING AND

EVALUATION RUN CONSISTENTLY THROUGH THE DISTRICT AND HOW WOULD THEY AFFECT CHOICE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A STRATEGY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT? Are there ideas that converge to a common vision valued by members of the staff, members of the community, and parents? Group members have images of themselves and agree on the way in which they perceive the world, based on common experience, values, and beliefs. Future action is going to be based on those ideas that members of groups share. It is important, therefore, to probe into the content and direction of these ideas.

- what ideas do the teaching staff have about testing and evaluation that would support or undermine the effort to use data generated by both for instructional improvement?
- what proportion of the staff would experience anxiety or threat regarding the use of test results to diagnose deficits in the instructional process?
- what proportion of the staff would be willing to undergo training in new skills and behaviors necessary to establish the test, evaluation, and instruction link?
- what proportion of individuals - members of the community, parents, media people - would be willing to participate in the effort?
- is there a 'critical mass' or total number of individuals within the staff, members of the community, and parents that are genuinely concerned over the issue of instructional improvement and would be supportive of measures taken in that direction?
- does this 'critical mass' see the proposed action as appropriate and adequate, that it will move the schools in the direction of the target, and that the benefits will outweigh the costs?

to what extent are those in leadership positions able to create a common vision that is valued by many members and a sense of urgency, of needing to take initiative and action?

- are there 'idea champions' that could imbue the staff with improvement fervor? what is the personal style of those individuals, what makes them important and how could they become an asset to the strategy under consideration?

Another major question could be posed in relation to those operational elements that are to be included in the management subsystem, such as, testing, evaluation, instruction, curriculum, supervision, staff development, budget, personnel, media: WHAT IS THE EXTENT AND KIND OF EXPERT FUNCTIONS NECESSARY TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT A DATA-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM?

- how much and what kind of technical knowledge is available within district units or at the school site? how can those resources be tapped?
- if knowledge and expertise outside the district have to be utilized, where is it and how accessible is it?
- what factors strongly influence teachers' decisions about the content of instruction? how do these factors relate to the findings from testing programs?
- how might staff development activities deal with testing and evaluation, especially with their linkages to instruction? who would be prepared to conduct training in the development of appropriate tests, interpretation of the information they generate, and the use of the information for diagnostic and prescriptive purposes?

- what effects does the current testing program have on the curriculum and how do these effects differ from the effects expected if a linkage system were established? how might this linkage shape the curriculum?
- what financial resources are available in the form of money, services, or materials and what guidelines and procedures are required for their use? what strings are attached to the funds? what kind or support from the media can be counted upon and how would this support help the effort?

The element of coordinating mechanisms refers to both formal and informal structures that function to maximize staff commitment to, and staff communication about data-based instructional change. Our major question then would be: HOW CAN THE ORGANIZED UNITS AND LEVELS WITHIN THE DISTRICT AND THE ROLES OF DIFFERENT ACTORS BE CONNECTED SO AS TO PLACE TESTING AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN A POSITION TO ASSIST TEACHERS? More specific questions might include.

- how might the information generated by testing and evaluation reach the different groups and in what form? who would make use of this information?
- is there complexity in the organization of the district such that additional demands made by the change effort would be difficult to cope with? would problems such as scheduling, limited personnel, staff turn-over reduce the likelihood of carrying the change through?
- what has the testing and evaluation branch of the district already done that has truly influenced instruction? how do the evaluation staff now relate to the staff of other branches and to the teaching

and administrative staffs at each school site? does the evaluation branch staff have the skill to work effectively with diverse views, opinions, and values?

- do different groups within the district communicate their meanings and intentions clearly, use appropriate decision-making methods, and involve a wide range of appropriate persons in the decision-making process?

The last element in the framework, impact, includes the ways in which the management subsystem might affect instruction, whether that effect is intended or unintended. The major questions then become: WHAT ARE THE DESIRED EFFECTS OF LINKING TESTING AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AT THE SCHOOL? WHICH GROUPS DO WE HOPE TO IMPACT? WHAT MIGHT CONSTITUTE OBSERVABLE OUTCOMES? WHAT HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES SHOULD WE TRY TO ANTICIPATE AND AVOID? Specific questions might include:

- what instructional improvements would be considered satisfactory in relation to the effort made? how would this instructional improvement be measured? are there short and long range goals to be attained?
- which groups might experience impact as a result of the management strategy? how would impact differ from group to group? what would each group be expected to do as a result?
- how would ideas and attitudes related to testing and evaluation change as a result of the intervention?

Summary. The purpose of this paper was to suggest to educators contemplating a strategy for data based instructional change questions that might

assist their thinking about the process. Data generated by tests and evaluation may be able to provide a sound basis for the management of the instructional system but such use requires a complex series of technologies and understandings.

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